

Declassified and Approved For Release 2013/07/15 : CIA-RDP09-00997R000100450001-9

Special Memorandum
6 May 1983
FB m 83-10019

Syrian and Saudi Public Response to the Shultz Mission

Declassified and Approved For Release 2013/07/15 : CIA-RDP09-00997R000100450001-9

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FBIS SPECIAL MEMORANDUM
6 MAY 1983

SYRIAN AND SAUDI PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE SHULTZ MISSION

S U M M A R Y

SYRIA

In its public response to Secretary of State Shultz's Middle East peace mission, Damascus has sought to dramatize its bid for a significant role in the outcome of the current negotiations. Syrian leaders have implied that Syria will veto any unacceptable settlement in Lebanon by refusing to withdraw its troops. Radio and press comment has been highly critical of the Secretary's mission from its inception last month. Authoritative commentaries have hammered the theme that the real purpose of the Shultz mission is to support Israeli ambitions in Lebanon and that it is Syria's duty to confront these aims. Damascus has fostered the atmosphere of confrontation by airing reports--many of them citing Soviet media sources--alleging that Israel is preparing to attack.

SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi leaders have been characteristically reserved about the Secretary's mission. Media comment has underlined Saudi concerns by reiterating standard themes: the need for the United States to pressure Israel into withdrawing from Lebanon and the need for a reexamination of the U.S. position on the Palestinian issue and the PLO. Saudi Arabia's traditional role as a power behind the scenes has been reflected in brief Riyadh reports on the visits of the Lebanese prime minister and the foreign ministers of Syria and Jordan, all of whom were received by King Fahd.

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FBIS SPECIAL MEMORANDUM
6 MAY 1983

- 1 -

SYRIAN AND SAUDI PUBLIC RESPONSE TO THE SHULTZ MISSION

SYRIA: POTENTIAL SPOILER

Syrian leaders have been unusually outspoken about Secretary of State Shultz's mission and the ongoing Lebanon negotiations but have left room for Damascus to maneuver. According to the Italian news agency ANSA, Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad told visiting Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo that Damascus had three conditions for withdrawing its troops from Lebanon: 1) that the Shultz mission "must lead to assurance of the complete independence and sovereignty of Lebanon"; 2) that Israel "must not emerge with any territorial or military advantages"; and 3) that Syria's "security requirements" must be taken into consideration. Asad further told Colombo that in talks earlier in the week with Lebanese Foreign Minister Elie Salim, he had taken "a negative and pessimistic view of the paragraphs of an Israeli-Lebanese draft agreement now under discussion."

The positions ascribed to Asad in the ANSA report are consistent with Damascus radio and television reporting and with Salim's account of the talks carried by Lebanese media. Syrian Foreign Minister 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam told a Damascus television interviewer on 2 May that Syria rejects U.S. pressure on Lebanon to accede to unfair Israeli demands. Beirut radio reported the same day that Asad told Salim "that he will frankly tell the U.S. Secretary of State when he meets with him at the end of the week that the United States and Israel are putting more pressure on Lebanon than it can bear." Syria has not been heard to formally announce a decision to receive Secretary Shultz.

MEDIA COMMENT Remarks by the Syrian leadership were preceded by a steady stream of media commentary highly critical of the Shultz mission. On 24 April, for example, a Damascus television commentary charged that the Secretary was being sent to the region to support new Israeli aggression and to pressure Lebanon into accepting an unfair settlement. Moreover, the real purpose of the mission, the commentary said, was to revive President Reagan's 1 September peace initiative.

These themes have since been stressed repeatedly in the Syrian Press--most notably by the government's paper, TISHRIN, and by AL-BA'TH, organ of the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party. On 27 April Damascus radio reported that AL-BA'TH linked what it alleged

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FBIS SPECIAL MEMORANDUM
6 MAY 1983

- 2 -

was an Israeli military escalation in the Biqa' Valley with a "concentration of U.S. forces in the Mediterranean," the Shultz mission, and "the Reagan Administration's political escalation." AL-BA'TH concluded: "It is obvious that the Shultz tour is no less dangerous . . . than those of his predecessors, Kissinger and Haig." A TISHRIN commentary on 30 April, reported by the Syrian news agency SANA, asserted that Syria would be able to foil Shultz's objectives.

Syrian comment on the Shultz mission has come against a back-drop of heightened tension fueled by Syrian allegations of Israeli military provocations in Lebanon. Damascus has carried several reports--including many attributed to the Soviet news agency TASS--that Israel is building up its forces in the Biqa' Valley in preparation for an attack on Syrian forces. On 28 April, for example, Damascus radio noted that "TASS condemned the Israeli occupation forces' provocative acts in Lebanon in preparation for aggression against Syria." On 2 May Damascus television prominently reported a Syrian tactical military exercise carried out in the presence of senior Syrian officials.

In a move apparently calculated to give the impression that Moscow would provide direct military support in any future confrontation with Israel, Damascus radio on 28 April quoted the Soviet magazine NOVOYE VREMYA as "calling on the United States to think twice before giving a new green light to the Zionist enemy." NOVOYE VREMYA, the radio said, warned Washington to bear three factors in mind: that Syria "is now in a position to defend itself," that Syria has "loyal friends," and that "new Zionist aggression" could have "bad consequences that go beyond the Middle East."

SAUDI ARABIA: QUIET BROKER

Always circumspect, the Saudi leadership has, for the most part, avoided public comment on the Shultz mission. In a departure from this usual reticence, Defense and Aviation Minister Prince Sultan Ibn 'Abd al-Aziz was reported by Radio Monte Carlo on 28 April to have said that the key question was not the length of the Shultz visit but U.S. success in "proving its true intentions by achieving security and stability" in Lebanon, by "helping the Lebanese Government to establish its authority over all Lebanese Territory," and by obtaining unconditional Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon with no cost to Lebanese sovereignty. The Monte Carlo report, citing unidentified "informed sources" in the Saudi Foreign Ministry, said that a Shultz stop in Riyadh was "linked to the success of his mission in the area."

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FBIS SPECIAL MEMORANDUM
6 MAY 1983

- 3 -

MEDIA COMMENT Over the past two weeks, Saudi media comment on the Shultz mission has forcefully reiterated Saudi Arabia's traditional call for a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East conflict that would address the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people. Many commentators have viewed success in achieving an Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon as the necessary first step in proving the United States is committed to resolving the wider Middle East question. While some have voiced cautious optimism in commenting on the Lebanon negotiations, the United States continues to be criticized for its position on the Palestinian question. Comment has maintained that resolution of the Palestinian issue is the linchpin in any overall Middle East peace settlement and frequently condemns Washington's refusal to recognize and negotiate with the PLO and its rejection of the concept of a Palestinian state.

An editorial published in the Jiddah daily 'UKAZ on 28 April summed up these themes. The editorial suggested that Secretary Shultz was aware that U.S. credibility depended on more than achieving success in the Lebanon negotiations. Arriving at a comprehensive settlement that would establish a "just and lasting peace" in the region is essential to establishing American credibility, the paper asserted. This just and lasting peace would have to be based on recognition of the Palestinian people's right to establish their own independent state. Characterizing the PLO as "a principal party" that should not be left out of the negotiating process, the editorial called on the United States to change its attitude and to "contact" that organization.

In recent days commentators looking at the more narrowly defined issue of the withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon have expressed cautious optimism over the continuing negotiations. On 1 May a Riyadh radio commentary called the hope that the talks might be leading toward an agreement "somewhat justified." It suggested that it would not be feasible for Secretary Shultz to leave the region emptyhanded, given the need to maintain U.S. prestige.

According to press reviews carried by Riyadh radio and the SAUDI PRESS AGENCY (SPA) on 3 May, an editorial in the Riyadh daily AL-JAZIRAH detected a "ray of hope" emerging with regard to the Lebanon negotiations. The paper asserted that success was Secretary Shultz's only option, because failure in these negotiations would mean "the resounding demise of the U.S. role in the Middle East." Riyadh radio aired a commentary the same day that voiced "extremely cautious optimism" regarding a possible

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY

FBIS SPECIAL MEMORANDUM
6 MAY 1983

- 4 -

accord on Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon. A more pessimistic note was sounded by the Dammam daily AL-YAWM on the 4th. Its editorial cautioned against "exaggerated" optimism that an agreement may be at hand, citing Israeli statements that "many issues" still need to be settled.

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY